

## **FAIRFIELD TAPS INTO ALTERNATIVE ENERGY THROUGH WIND FOR SCHOOLS PROGRAM**

*By Zachary Franz*

A wind turbine installed Thursday at Fairfield High School will produce power for the school while helping students learn about wind and alternative energy sources.

Gov. Brian Schweitzer looked on as engineers finished putting together the 1.8 kilowatt unit Thursday. After an inspection, the turbine will produce about half as much power as a typical household uses, said project coordinator Sean Micken.

The project is part of the Wind for Schools program set up by the federal Department of Energy and coordinated by Western Community Energy. NorthWestern Energy pitched in \$12,000 to cover the cost of the turbine in Fairfield.

A similar turbine was installed Monday on the Montana State University campus through the same program. Schools in Cascade, Stanford and Livingston also are scheduled to get 45-foot-high turbines in the coming weeks.

Montana is one of six states selected by the DOE to participate in the program.

In Fairfield, the spinning 6-foot blades will produce power for the bus barn. Officials said that using wind power will reduce the school's electricity bill during the school year. Over the summer, when the school doesn't need much electricity, the energy will go back into the power grid, unwinding the school's electric meter.

But the turbine isn't all about saving money.

"This program is really more about education and providing access to technology that students are going to encounter more and more often," Micken said.

Fairfield science teacher Rai Hahn expects the turbine to be a powerful teaching tool.

"The big thing is the hands-on opportunity, to get away from the textbooks," Hahn said. "Now we can come outside and see a real wind turbine."

That can make a big difference, he added.

"Sometimes you'll have a student who's an average student," he said. "Then they'll get involved in a hands-on project and they'll become an exceptional student."

Having a turbine on school property also will help students develop skills and interest in a booming industry, Hahn said. He expects wind energy to produce many new, high-paying jobs in the years to come.

"We want Montana kids to fill those jobs," he said.

Schweitzer said that relatively small turbines like the one installed at Fairfield link the future and the past.

Early in the last century, small turbines provided electricity for each farm across rural Montana, with the electricity stored in big batteries. With improved batteries and more affordable turbines, that could once again become the model, the governor said.

"Eighty years ago, people in Fairfield mostly had wind turbines producing their energy," he said. "I hope within 10 years, we can get back to where we were 80 years ago."

The state offers tax credits to homeowners who want to buy a wind turbine, he said.

Schweitzer said it won't be long until every school in Montana gets some of its power from wind.

C.M. Russell High School in Great Falls was expected to join that group last spring by installing a wind turbine for its science and technology programs, but that project was delayed.

School officials said some of the parts for the wind turbine weren't sent to Great Falls until this summer. The project remains stalled because the school has to get permits from the city to erect the tower.

CMR's wind turbine is not affiliated with the Wind for Schools program.